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ABSTRACT

The author, Executive Director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sport (PCPFS), describes the efforts of the Council in improving the fitness levels of Americans through research, information dissemination, and action programs. Defined as the "ability to carry out daily tasks with vigor and alertness, without undue fatigue, and with ample energy to enjoy leisure time pursuits and to meet unforseen emergencies," physical fitness is a positive quality, extending on a scale from death to abundant life. Discussed in the presentation are: the decline in coronary death rates in the United States, the importance of exercise, national exercise patterns, the favorable climate for physical fitness, prevention programs of the PCPFS, presidential support, and PCPFS priorities. (MJB)

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THE REVITALIZATION OF PHYSICAL FITNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

by
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Definition of Physical Fitness

The first issue of the PHYSICAL FITNESS RESEARCH DIGEST published by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS) in July 1971 defined physical fitness as "the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigor and alertness, without undue fatigue, and with ample energy to enjoy leisure time pursuits and to meet unforeseen emergencies." Thus physical fitness is the ability to last, to bear up, to withstand stress, and to persevere under difficult circumstances where an unfit person would quit. It is the opposite to becoming fatigued from ordinary efforts, to lacking energy to enter zestfully into life's activities, and to becoming exhausted from unexpected, demanding physical exertion.

The definition given implies that physical fitness is more than "not being sick" or merely "being well." It is different from immunity to disease. It is a positive quality, extending on a scale from death to abundant life. All living individuals, thus, have some degree of physical fitness, which is minimal in the severely ill and maximal in the highly trained athlete; it varies considerably in different people and in the same person from time to time.

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Inasmuch as man is a total individual--not divisible into discrete parts--his physical fitness affects in some degree all of his life's activities.

If you will accept this definition, we have no problem. Unfortunately, a number in the profession of physical education feel that physical fitness is a bad word, to be avoided at any cost. If you are in this category, the future will hold great frustrations for you, as you will be hearing more and more about the need for improved physical fitness in this country.

Physical Fitness A Special Concern

Physical fitness is the special concern of the PCPFS, as the President has directed the Secretary of HEW through Executive Order to develop and coordinate a national program, "to strengthen the physical fitness of American children, youth and adults." The PCPFS is a Presidential agency assigned to the Public Health Service, and its programs are an essential part of the national effort to reduce human suffering and high health care costs through prevention. The quality of life, including personal health, has become a national preoccupation and a focal point of government policy and private initiative.

Health-related expenditures amounted to $140 billion in 1976. About this sum, two things can be said with certainty: 1) that is an awful lot of money, and 2) such expenditure won't have any noticeable long-term effect on the health of the American people. It seems to be an outrageous thing to say, but that is the way it

is. Our annual health care bill is equal to approximately one-half of the Gross National Product. Yet when the year ends and all the money has been spent, the life expectancy figures and mortality statistics won't look any better than they did in the year's beginning. As a matter of fact, the health outlook for an American adult is only marginally better than it was a generation ago, except for some encouraging gains in the prevention of fatal heart disease among middle-aged males.

Decline in Coronary Death Rate

The National Center for Health Statistics has noted a steady decline in the death rate from coronary heart disease from 1963 to 1976. It was reported that the death rate for 55-66 year-old males dropped almost 15% in the last six years; and much of the improvement in health statistics came from individual action. Major private and government programs of public education about heart disease prevention have been identified as possible factors in this dramatic decline.

It is of interest to the Public Health Service that the PCPFS launched its Adult Physical Fitness Advertising and Information Campaigns in the summer of 1963. At approximately the same time, the Council began a series of Medical Symposiums on Exercise and the Heart which have been conducted in various sections of the United States in cooperation with the American Heart Association, the American Medical Association, State and local Medical/Heart Associations. The AHA and the Council since the early '60s have

served as national advocates for regular, vigorous exercise as one means of reducing the risk and seriousness of heart attacks.

Other factors cited in the improving heart disease picture were: better medical care, more widespread treatment of high blood pressure, a greater effort to limit fats in the diet, and less cigarette smoking among middle-aged men.

When I was a boy, some of the major killers were communicable diseases--diptheria, tuberculosis, influenza, polio, etc. Today these scourges have been largely brought under control. Our lives are far more likely to be imperiled by our own sins of commission and omission--by eating too much, by carelessness on the highway, by smoking or by failure to exercise.

Despite the radically different nature of our problems today, we still tend to approach health care pretty much as we always have. Americans have an almost childlike faith in the powers of the physician and his science. On one level, that is good: on another, it is part of the problem.

Many people never give their health a serious thought until they become ill. I have always thought that the saying of the old Egyptians spelled out the problem as well as any, "Health is a crown on a well man's head; but the only one who can see it is a sick man."

One becomes ill, then goes to the doctor, fully expecting the doctor to give a pill or a shot to make him well again. The problem with that is that there aren't any medicines for some of the things that ail us today. The only defense is to not develop a health problem in the first place. We already have enough knowledge to make major lifesaving gains.

Importance of Exercise

Dr. Roger Egeberg, former dean of the USC School of Medicine and chief health advisor in HEW for the last decade, told a White House gathering last year that proper fitness could contribute as much to the nation's health as immunization and sanitation advances accomplished in the early part of this century.

When appearing before a Senate Subcommittee on Aging in 1976, Frederick C. Swartz, M.D., speaking on behalf of the American Medical Association, testified that physical unfitness is the country's greatest health problem and yet the answer is the simplest, cheapest and has the greatest potential for results of any aspect of healthful living. He also said that the basis for a lifetime program of exercise begins with quality physical education in the schools.

Increasingly medical authorities are recognizing that our best hope for improving health and the quality of living lies in prevention. It is not merely the most practical, as Dr. Swartz mentioned: it may be the only course that we can afford. Now

that the cost of our indulgence is finally catching up with us, it may be that we can no longer buy our way out of health difficulties. The alternative is found in the current 5-year Plan of the Public Health Service which states, "We believe it is more productive to focus our attention on the underlying conditions and causes of preventable diseases than to concentrate on the diseases themselves." The PHS document goes on to list "habitual inactivity" as a major factor in the poor health of Americans. Habitual inactivity is thought to contribute to hypertension, chronic fatigue, resultant physical inefficiency, the poor musculature and lack of flexibility which are the major causes of lower back problems and injuries, mental tension, coronary heart disease, and obesity. By contrast, studies have reported that regular exercise is essential to the kind of vibrant health that everyone would like to have. What are we doing about it?

Just How Much Do Americans Exercise?

As a result of research conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation, the PCPFS found that:

. 50 million of the 110 million adult Americans never engage in physical activity for exercise. These sedentary Americans tend to be older, less well educated, and less affluent than those who exercise.

. Of the 55% adult Americans who exercise, nearly 44 million walk; 18 million ride bicycles; 14 million swim; 14 million do calisthenics; and 6.5 million jog. Unfortunately, the number who

exercise regularly and vigorously are in the minority.

The Why!

. The rank order of response as to reasons why people exercise were:

1) Concern about health

2) Desire to lose weight

3) Enjoyment one derives from sport/physical activity

. The most active adults are those who participated in two or more sports while in school and/or college. More than two-thirds of these still exercise regularly as opposed to fewer than one-half of those who were not athletes.

. The least active Americans are those who never took physical education.

. Sixty-six percent of the adult population has had PE at some educational level.

. When asked if they felt PE should be conducted, over 90 percent of American adults answered Yes and only 4 percent were flatly opposed to PE. Of those who had taken physical education, 85 percent felt it was good for them; 11 percent didn't feel it made any difference; one and one-half percent didn't know; and one and one-half percent felt it was bad.

There is an interesting aspect to the statistical number of those who did not indicate a strong, positive position of support for physical education. The 15 percent parallels

the estimate of the number of physically underdeveloped pupils which the PCPFS found through pilot studies at elementary and secondary levels. In most cases, these children who had a low hand/eye coordination level. In such cases, unless individuals have an excellent program in the primary grades, they never get in the mainstream of sports activities. Not finding satisfaction out of the typical ballgames and often encouraged by their parents, they turn away from sports and other physical activities. When this happens, you see an enactment of the "poor-get-poorer" concept. The PCPFS has found, however, that such children can improve dramatically on endurance and stamina, strength and flexibility activities. As a result, the national program of physical fitness and sports will place special emphasis on the identification and programming of the physically underdeveloped pupil this school year. The publication, The Physically Underdeveloped Child, has just been printed and forwarded to every school and educational authority in this country. I commend this program to you as a special concern.

The research to which I previously referred also indicated that the adult who is currently exercising regularly was most likely to be one who had physical education and participated in two or more organized sports while in school. This indicates the importance of physical education as an essential subject of basic general education.

This reminds me of the advice given to me years ago by the late Dr. A. A. Esslinger when he was Dean of the College of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Oregon. He said that a lifetime of exercise and sports participation is most likely when an individual:

1) Knows and understands the effects of physical exercise and physical inactivity;
2) Has progressively developed a high level of physical fitness so that he has experienced the state of euphoria which accompanies this level;
3) Has developed a moderate level of skill in several carryover sports - one for several seasons; and
4) Has an understanding of the principles of exercise and how to apply them and skills of an exercise program which he can use individually in his home, hotel, etc.

Favorable Climate for Physical Fitness

In a democracy which is based upon the free enterprise system, "the bottom line" figure usually is a major factor which influences change. Let's face it--we are in trouble! The financial statistics of health care are horrendous, if you are concerned with the national pocketbook. The total national expenditures for health rose from $12 billion in 1950 to the $140 billion reported earlier for 1976. For the average family of 4, total costs went from $320 to $2,400. Based on the last six years, health care cost increases are at least double the rate of inflation. The Department of HEW reports

that health care costs will soar almost 40 percent to $220 billion a year by 1980 even without national health insurance and will absorb close to 10 percent of our Gross National Product. Some health economists have warned that such continued increases may threaten our nation with bankruptcy.

As an alternative, leaders in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) recognize the exciting opportunity which we now have in prevention. They are saying there is both a social and technical consensus on the benefits of prevention. Some are urging that a national policy for prevention financing should be the "first dollar" and not the "last dollar."

One of the factors which will be addressed is the lack of exercise. The PCPFS has been promoted to the Special Health Initiatives Office, USPHS. Representatives of the Council staff are members of the Task Force for Prevention Initiatives of the PHS.

Prevention Programs of the PCPFS

At the first meeting of the Surgeon General's staff of PHS officials, the PCPFS Executive Director reported on the following highlights of the Council's prevention programs for FY 1977:

Advertising. Public service fitness materials were provided to 700 TV stations, 8,000 radio stations, 2,400 general circulation magazines, and 3,100 specialized journals (business press). A direct-mail campaign reached 103,000-plus schools, Y's, boys' clubs, Jewish Community Centers, and other youth-serving agencies.

TV/Films. The Council supplies technical information and advice for numerous films and TV shows and series, including the TWA in-flight film series, "Prevention."

Magazine Articles. The Council was a principal source of leads, quotations, and statistical information for cover stories on physical fitness appearing in Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, Fortune, Vogue, Reader's Digest, etc.

Publications. The Physical Fitness Research Digest and Physical Fitness/Sports Medicine (a quarterly bibliographic service published in cooperation with the National Library of Medicine). New booklets developed included The Physically Underdeveloped Child (identification and remedial action), Exercise and Weight Control, and Aqua Dynamics (water exercises).

Fitness for the Elderly. The Council assisted the Administration on Aging in developing and presenting "Join the Active People Over 60," a national program for training exercise leaders for the elderly. Workshops were conducted in eight regions, 12 States, and 32 counties and/or municipalities, and more than 140,000 persons have participated in the program.

Fitness for the Work Force. Council staff members worked with nearly 400 large corporations, 11 Federal agencies, two unions and five national associations on the development of leadership, facilities, and programs for employee fitness.

Leadership Training. More than 5,000 persons from 15 States participated in the regional clinics conducted by the Council. Fifteen companies provided support for the clinics.

Presidential Physical Fitness Award. More than 18 million boys and girls, ages 10-17, participated in the physical fitness testing program, and a record 662,000-plus earned the nation's highest award for fitness. More than 1,200 schools took part in the State Champions program, which recognizes the school in each State and the District of Columbia with the most effective fitness program.

Presidential Sports Award. 1.2 million persons aged 15 years and over took part in the sports participation program. More than 40,000 qualified for awards.

Technical Services. Consultant services were provided in 762 instances, mostly to schools and colleges, park and recreation departments, youth-serving agencies, and large employers.

Federal-State Relations. The Council assisted in the establishment of five new governors' councils on physical fitness.

A detailed list of over 50 Council projects was made possible through the private sector and other Federal agencies which spent more than $31 million on cosponsored programs conducted or initiated by the PCPFS.

Presidential Support

President Jimmy Carter places high value on the importance of physical education/fitness and sports for all in schools, communities and colleges. The President believes emphasis on the physically underdeveloped child should be given high priority. The President has cited the growing public awareness and the acceptance of the importance of physical activity in our daily lives as an indication that now is the time for positive action.

The President has long been an advocate of physical fitness and sports participation. During his years at the Naval Academy where he competed in cross-country running, he was well trained in physical fitness and lifetime sports through the Academy's broad and varied physical education and athletic programs. While in Atlanta, he was a regular jogger and is now a tennis enthusiast.

Physical Education is Health Insurance

Physical education is unique in that it is the only subject in the curriculum that can insure adequate regular, vigorous exercise for all pupils. The widespread support of physical fitness provides a positive climate for the promotion of many of your goals. You are encouraged to prepare to do so.

PCPFS Priorities

The PCPFS has the following priorities:

* Quality daily physical education in elementary and secondary schools emphasizing the development of physical fitness and

lifetime sports skills and the understanding of the effects regular exercise has on the body.

* Identification of and programming for the physically underdeveloped pupil.

* Mass emphasis on physical fitness and sports for all Americans including the poor, elderly and handicapped.

* An expanded public information campaign to provide understanding of the contributions exercise can make to health performance and the quality of life.

* Organize a national movement to provide formalized fitness trails in parks, schools, colleges, universities, the private sector and other suitable areas, aimed at moving America's runners/joggers off of the streets. With the increasing number of joggers, such athletes face a traffic safety hazard.

  This week the City Council of Los Angeles Hills, California is considering a recommendation of the Sheriff's office and will decide whether highway joggers will be given citations and face the possibility of a $500 fine or whether they will only have to carry a jogger's permit in their pockets. The city manager has voiced concern that one car swinging around the highway at the wrong time could possibly wipe out 45 joggers in one sweep. He stated further that on weekends there are sometimes 100 joggers strong with

five or six abreast, refusing to get out of the traffic lanes. It is time we follow European practice of jogging in parks and forests. The only highway runners you see in Europe are Americans.

* Establishment and promotion of simple, understandable goals such as:

  1) Every high school pupil should be able to demonstrate his ability to run/jog two miles in 16 minutes. Anyone without physical limitations who is progressively conditioned can attain this goal. A minimal amount of skill is required. Rarely could an individual who is overweight, takes drugs, or smokes meet this goal.

  2) Every student a swimmer.

  3) Qualifying one percent of the potential eligible (330,000) or more for the President's Physical Fitness Award.

  4) Involving 10 percent (11 million) more American adults in engaging in physical activity for the purpose of exercise.

  5) Double the number of joggers in the next four years.

Summary

After nearly 40 years of talking in terms of general philosophy and professional all-over goals, I've decided there hasn't been

much change. As a result, I'm laying out recommendations in simple specifics. If implemented by 15 percent of you, this investment in appearing before you would be one of the most productive and satisfying of my professional life.

God Bless You.